



## **DECISION NOTICE: Salmon Lake State Park Forest Health Improvement Project**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region 2  
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula MT 59804  
Phone 406-542-5500

October 26, 2020

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct forest management treatments on approximately 30 acres of forest at Salmon Lake State Park in FWP Region 2, south of Seeley Lake in Missoula County. The work could begin as early as November 2020.

The objectives of the proposed forest management treatments are:

1. Removing hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety, forest health, park property, and park infrastructure;
2. reducing the potential for hazard trees to develop by maintaining or enhancing individual tree and stand-level resilience and resistance to stressors and damaging agents (e.g., drought, insects and disease, wildfire);
3. reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface;
4. improving and maintaining Park aesthetics; and
5. selling any resulting merchantable tree byproducts to offset treatment costs and potentially generate revenue for the FWP Forest Management Account.

The treatments would involve approximately 30 acres of tree removal (including trees of merchantable and nonmerchantable value). Tree planting may also be implemented in small openings created by tree removal. The operating period for the proposed treatments would be from October 1 through April 15 in order to minimize impacts to Park users. Ground-based logging equipment would be restricted to operating under relatively dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions in order to minimize impacts to soil and vegetation. Other clean-up and rehabilitation activities, such as slash treatment, grass seeding, and tree planting would be short duration (1 to 2 days) and could potentially occur throughout the operating period. Roads and harvest would comply with Best Management Practices (BMPs). Control of noxious weeds would be included as part of the treatments.

Following this action, FWP anticipates that public safety and forest resilience will be improved. By addressing the underlying forest health issues that lead to the development of hazard trees, FWP may realize reduced annual operations and maintenance costs. Treatments would also reduce the risk of crown fire that could pose a risk to neighboring landowners and negatively affect the quality of the recreational experience of these sites.

Costs to FWP for these forest management treatments are expected to be covered by Park operations budget, grants, and the sale of merchantable timber byproduct. Any revenue in excess of project costs would be deposited into the legislatively established FWP Forest Management Account to implement further forest management projects pursuant to the provisions of 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv), Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

## **Alternatives**

Alternative A: No Action. If FWP decides not to proceed with the proposed action, Salmon Lake State Park would not receive forest management treatments at this time. Forest succession and competition amongst trees for limited resources would continue, leading to decreased stand vigor and potential for trees and stands to be less resilient to stressors and damaging agents. Dead and downed fuels may increase, negatively affecting the aesthetics of the Park and make hiking in these areas more difficult. No timber would be sold to potentially generate revenue for the FWP forest management account. FWP would continue mitigating hazard trees and maintaining improvements.

Alternative B: Proposed Action. FWP would conduct forested habitat treatments on approximately 30 acres of the Salmon Lake State Park. Following this action, FWP anticipates that hazard trees would be mitigated, tree vigor and resilience to insects and diseases would be improved, hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface would be reduced, aesthetics would be improved, and the sale of timber may generate revenue for the FWP forest management account.

## **PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and to make a decision based on this information.

- FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (Salmon Lake State Park Forest Health Improvement Project) on August 28, 2020 and accepted public comment for 30 days until September 28, 2020.
- Legal notice of the availability of the Draft EA was published once each in the *Independent Record* (Helena, Aug 28), *Missoulian* (Aug 28), and *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (Seeley Lake, Sep 3) newspapers.
- FWP mailed 7 copies of the EA (and approximately 64 email notifications of the EA's availability) to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov>, "Public Notices") from August 28 through September 28, 2020.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **Summary of Public Comment**

FWP received 3 comments during the public review period. One comment (representing 2 people) was from an adjacent landowner in Seeley Lake. Two comments were from Missoula County's Community and Planning Services (CAPS, Missoula): 1 from the Director and 1 from the Floodplain Administrator. See the Appendix for all comments received.

Two commenters (the individual and CAPS Director) supported the proposed action, and one did not indicate support nor opposition. No commenters were in opposition. Comments received in support of the proposed action included [numbers in brackets refer to the Commenter # in the Appendix]:

- "We think this is a good project and will help protect the park and us from fire. We are supportive of the proposal." [2]

- *“We support efforts to improve the forest health in the park.” [3.1]*
- *“Again, thank you . . . for your continued work to enhance natural resource values that are important to Missoula County residents.” [3.3]*

## **Response to Public Comment**

The following summarized comments encompass specific issues, questions or suggestions received during the public comment period, along with FWP’s responses.

*Comment A: Do you happen to know if any work is proposed within 20' of the lakeshore? [1a]*

**FWP Response:** If hazard trees that pose a threat to campers or park infrastructure exist within 20' of the lakeshore, they would either be cut by equipment from an existing road or hand-felled away from the lake and skidded (dragged away). The operations would take place under dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions, and there would be a very low likelihood of any impacts to the lake shore from this activity.

*Comment B: The lake and 20' back are subject to the Missoula County Shoreline Regulations so to be consistent with what we require of private property owners we would ask that any trees removed within that 20' shoreline protection zone leave the root structure intact to minimize impacts. [1b]*

**FWP Response:** FWP understands and will conform to the Missoula County Shoreline Regulations.

*Comment C: To best address fire hazard fuels in the WUI, Missoula County encourages significant attention be paid to the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) to reduce the potential for home and structure loss during a wildfire event. Much of the home/structure destruction during wildfires occurs hours after the wildfire has ceased intense burning near a community and home ignitions result from conditions local to a home or structure. Removing flammable materials near structures, along with ongoing maintenance and treatment of vegetation in the HIZ, greatly reduces structure ignition potential. We encourage you to consider a Wildfire Risk Assessment in conjunction with the proposed forest health improvement project. You can learn more on Missoula County's Wildfire Preparedness Website:*

<https://www.missoulacounty.us/government/public-safety/office-of-emergency-management/wildfire-preparedness>. [3.2]

**FWP Response:** Thank you for your comment. Salmon Lake State Park is bordered by Salmon Lake, Highway 83, and other public lands with the exception of a very small (~200 feet) portion on the north end however none of this land is within the HIZ of a home. Within the Park, there are several structures such as toilets and picnic structures. FWP maintains these structure through annual maintenance including actions that remove flammable materials around these structures. The proposed action would primarily reduce hazardous fuels in the WUI by increasing spacing between crowns of overstory trees and reducing ladder fuels, thereby reducing the potential for crown fire in the treated stands.

## **DECISION**

Based upon the EA and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

Comments on the EA submitted to FWP were supportive and none opposed the project. The proposal was well publicized. No concerns were raised that would bring the environmental analysis into question.

By notification of this Decision Notice (DN), the draft EA and this DN (and the information discussed herein) are hereby made the final EA.

Based on the analysis in the draft EA and the public comment received, I have selected the "Proposed Action" (Alternative B). FWP will conduct forest health improvement actions at Salmon Lake State Park.



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Randy Arnold  
Region 2 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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10-26-2020  
Date

**APPENDIX.** Comments on the proposed forest health improvement project at Salmon Lake State Park and its Draft EA, received by FWP during the comment period August 28 through September 28, 2020. Comments received via: E = email.

Com- men- ter #	Via	Para- graph	Comment
1a	E		Do you happen to know any work is proposed within 20' of the lakeshore?
1b	E		The lake and 20' back are subject to the Missoula County Shoreline Regulations so to be consistent with what we require of private property owners we would ask that any trees removed within that 20' shoreline protection zone leave the root structure intact to minimize impacts. I imagine that's what you'd probably do anyway
2	E		We are the neighbors to the immediate north of Salmon Lake State Park. We have reviewed the draft EA for the Forest Health Improvement Project for the park. We think this is a good project that will help protect the park and us from fire. We are supportive of the proposal.
3	E	1	Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft EA for the Salmon Lake State Park Forest Health Improvement Project. We support efforts to improve the forest health in the park.
		2	The project's purposes are for "mitigating hazard trees in developed areas, reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface (WUI), and increasing resiliency of forested areas to insects and diseases." To best address fire hazard fuels in the WUI, Missoula County encourages significant attention be paid to the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) to reduce the potential for home and structure loss during a wildfire event. Much of the home/structure destruction during wildfires occurs hours after the wildfire has ceased intense burning near a community and home ignitions result from conditions local to a home or structure. Removing flammable materials near structures, along with ongoing maintenance and treatment of vegetation in the HIZ, greatly reduces structure ignition potential. We encourage you to consider a Wildfire Risk Assessment in conjunction with the proposed forest health improvement project. You can learn more on Missoula County's Wildfire Preparedness Website: <a href="https://www.missoulacounty.us/government/public-safety/office-of-emergency-management/wildfire-preparedness">https://www.missoulacounty.us/government/public-safety/office-of-emergency-management/wildfire-preparedness</a> .
		3	Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project and for your continued work to enhance natural resource values that are important to Missoula County residents.